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Department of Educational Foundations, Management and Curriculum Studies

THE ASSOCIATION BETWEEN CULTURAL CAPITAL AND ACADEMIC WRITING
SKILLS: A CASE STUDY OF LEVEL ONE SEMESTER ONE COMMUNICATION SKILLS
STUDENTS IN THE FACULTIES OF ARTS AND SOCIAL SCIENCES AT MIDLANDS
STATE UNIVERSITY

BY

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A research project submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the Master of Education
Degree in Educational Sociology

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THE ASSOCIATION BETWEEN CULTURAL CAPITAL AND ACADEMIC WRITING SKILLS: A CASE STUDY OF LEVEL ONE SEMESTER ONE COMMUNICATION SKILLS STUDENTS IN THE FACULTIES OF ARTS AND SOCIAL SCIENCES AT MIDLANDS STATE UNIVERSITY

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ABSTRACT

THE ASSOCIATION BETWEEN CULTURAL CAPITAL AND ACADEMIC WRITING SKILLS: A CASE STUDY OF LEVEL ONE SEMESTER ONE COMMUNICATION SKILLS STUDENTS IN THE FACULTIES OF ARTS AND SOCIAL SCIENCES AT THE MIDLANDS STATE UNIVERSITY

By

Moreen Mugomba

This study was carried out to investigate the association between cultural capital and academic writing skills of level one semester one Communication Skills students with particular reference to Midlands State University. This study was informed by the cultural capital framework. A case study design was used. Questionnaires were administered to 117 level one semester one Communication Skills students of which 53.6% were females. Four lecturers were interviewed while assignments were analysed as part of document analysis. The researcher found out that while some variables of cultural capital like father's occupations, parental level of education and language are associated with academic writing skills of students, others as areas of residence and schools attended are not. The study made a number of recommendations aimed at improving and enhancing academic writing skills of students. The study recommended that parents should encourage the use of English at home and expose their children to various forms of media such as televisions.

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DEDICATION

To my parents, Mr. and Mrs. Matonga for all the support and encouragement and for taking care of my children while I studied.

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CHAPTER 1

THE PROBLEM AND ITS CONTEXT

1.1 Introduction

Post-secondary students are required to write in courses at university as a form of assessment. Writing assignments helps students develop skills of critical thinking and analysis. However, students' assignments at university demonstrate inconsistencies in language structures, varying from grammar, intonation, spelling to sentence construction.

This chapter focuses on the background to the study, statement of the problem, research questions and importance of the study, assumptions, limitations, delimitations and definition of key terms.

1.2 Background of the study

Over the first twenty years of independence, Zimbabwe's population of over thirteen million has witnessed incredible strides in university expansion. According to Maunde (2003), there has been only one university in Zimbabwe since 1957. It was not until 1991 when the second state funded university was established in Bulawayo. This became the National University of Science and Technology. Then, from 1995 began a period of rapid expansion of higher education with a particular emphasis on increasing university access. This has led to eight state universities which are, University of Zimbabwe, National University of Science and Technology, Midlands State, Chinhoyi University of Technology, Bindura, Great Zimbabwe, Lupane and Zimbabwe Open University. There are also four private universities including Catholic University, Solusi, Africa and Women University. The drive to increase access to university education has resulted in universities springing up all over the country. "University education has been of late made

available to people regardless of gender, race, tribe, creed and financial background.” (Nziramasanga Commission 1999:485) As a result, Zimbabwe boasts of the highest literacy rate in sub-Saharan Africa. Zimbabwe’s culture places a high premium on education, and before students can enter university, they have to undergo seven years of primary education and six years of secondary schooling.

According to Van Dyk, Zybrands, Collie & Coetzee (2009), in South Africa, the past couple of years has seen a high level of ‘massification’ of education both in lower and higher education sectors leading to students arriving “under prepared at tertiary institutions” .The same has happened in Zimbabwe. This open admission policy, where the university enrolls as many as their faculties can accommodate, has weakened the system in that quality assurance has been compromised as administration enrolls students with as little as two points at ‘A’ level to accommodate the ‘education for all’ policy. Though the policy has been criticized, educationists have indicated that universities are obligated by their context to serve the needs of their communities as a social responsibility, to cater even for the deprived student. Thus, this under preparedness of students consistently leads to low throughput rates, leading to high dropout rates. (Van Dyk et al, 2009).These authors further go on to say that a low level of competence in the language of teaching and learning is regarded as one of the principal reasons for the lack of academic success among students, even among those with great academic potential.

Kariwo (2007), in his Zimbabwean studies of widening access in higher education says universities operate under an Act of Parliament and the relationship between the government and the university is loosely defined. The Act simply states that the “Minister of Higher Education shall give direction in matters of policy” (Kariwo 2006:22). This clause of Parliament has been widely interpreted by university administration leading to extremes of state control: the tight and

laissez faire with some universities being too strict and others less strict in their ways of operation. According to the Nziramasanga Commission (1999) a requirement entry into the University of Zimbabwe is that, all candidates should have passed English language at “O” Level.

With regards language policy at universities, Hungwe (2007) says the official language policy in Zimbabwe before and after independence has been characterized by continuities rather than change, providing limited support for the development of indigenous languages. Furthermore, the capacity to support the development of indigenous languages has declined in recent years “The curriculum policy has progressively served to provide avenues for engaging and looking into limited networks of opportunities within and outside the country”(Hungwe, 2007:135) In light of this, Kaplan and Baldauf (2007) say a language policy is often delegated to the education sector. “Language policy and planning has been conceived as an effort, usually at national level, to change the language behaviors of some population for some stated or implied reason.”(Kaplan & Baldauf 2007:50). Zimbabwe is a bilingual country with Shona and Ndebele being the predominant languages at home and school, therefore English learning starts usually at primary school for most students, mostly at grade zero. The language policy adopted at independence and enshrined in the 1987 Education Act enhanced the status of local languages while recognizing the importance of English as the language of business and administration, thus it is the official language used at universities.

In a study carried out at Nanzan Junior College, in Asia, on helping Asian foreign language students acquire academic writing skills, Newsfields (2003:100) says that “academic writing is a distinct genre, but students often write the same way they speak, in a casual tone and they often disregard discourse level features such as cohesion and coherence. Most students are redundant

and superfluous in their writing, plagiarize sources and lack clear citation of sources leading to their academic writing lacking balance, leaving no semblance of objectivity and bias. The essays are therefore presented in one perspective and usually rely on a few sources of which there would be no critical balance in their papers”. Collier and Morgan (2008) assert that students report that they do not have enough information about how to write and express their frustrations about receiving low evaluations of their writing performance on class assignments. Perhaps, this perpetuates the poor handling of academic literacy.

Students have a writing problem in that they reproduce content information from a source without restructuring it to address the focal demand of the question. Communication Skills is not primarily a mental discipline but a tool for communication. It therefore assesses the uses learners can make of the code of a language. Skills cannot be lectured but taught or instructed.

Bigelow (2007) asserts that students’ gaps in English language proficiency or background knowledge are often the focus of discussion around their educational needs. Communication Skills is a discipline at university which is practiced and engaged with transforming and informing outcomes. Vinson (2010:135), in a study at Liverpool John Moores University, argues that “no mission is more vital to the success of higher education than ensuring rapid transmission of these new students to a university culture.” This means that students have to assimilate and understand a new environment, that is the university and this engagement is affected by the human, social, and cultural capital that they bring to their places of study. Graves (2010:95) in a Canadian study argued that “writing assignments help students understand the distinctive features of disciplinary knowledge and develop broader skills of critical thinking.” This shows that academic writing is a requirement at university in all disciplines.

At Lamar University, in the United States of America, Collier and Morgan (2008) carried out a study and noted that faculty often found students did not follow directions that were clearly written and provided to them regarding assignments and course expectations. Additionally, areas that emerged as faculty expectation concerns regarding student performance included workload and priorities, the explicitness of expectations and assignments, and issues related to communication. Collier and Morgan (2008) found out that faculty had expectations that students would come to class knowing basic writing skills such as spelling, grammar and sentence structure. Additionally, faculty expected graduate students to have knowledge about references, citations, and use of accepted guidelines such as American Psychological Association or Chicago writing style. Caffarella and Barnett (2000:39) reported that “faculty are shocked to find many graduate students not only do not write like scholars, but they also may not think like scholars” The implication here is that students at Lamar and generalized at other universities have not reached academic maturity and this affects their academic writing ability.

The emphasis of teaching writing, the practice of writing, and the impact on student achievement is well documented by the National Writing Project (Lieberman & Friedrich, 2007). These authors report that writing is a tool that unlocks students’ critical thinking, analytical skills and creativity. Emphasizing writing skills at university may be linked to improvement in test performance and student academic achievement in writing. They further reported that professional development emphasizing writing skills in a community of practice involving university faculty and experienced teachers proved to be effective in improving their teaching of writing. Support for emphasizing teaching of writing skills in higher education result in competent students. Rose and McClafferty, (2001) say that students want instruction in writing;

specifically they want to be taught how to write, how to communicate, how to integrate writing across the curriculum, and how to grow through writing.

According to Jennifer (2006:640), to succeed at university level, it is important to become proficient in the four language skills and, “writing is the most difficult to master” Most who are fluent in speaking are not good writers. Learning formal written English can be equated to learning another language, as the appropriate language style is rather different than that used in conversation. Many university students struggle with genre writing, as discourse communities in campus have different expectations for writing in specific disciplines. Jennifer (2006) further goes on to say that many believe that one’s ability in second language is highly dependent on one’s writing ability in native tongue thus knowing how to write the basic structure of an essay and how to formulate arguments in first language can greatly enhance one’s ability in second language. Transferability depends in part on one’s exposure to similar background knowledge. Carson (1992) cautions that cultural learning differences can both enhance and complicate second language acquisition and thus teachers should take into account students’ cultural expectations of the preferences for learning English writing skills “Knowing about the educational background of their students can provide insight into the ways in which writers may approach the often formidable task of writing in English”. (Carson, 1992:45)

Abbate –Vaughn (2007) studied general and academic writing skills of pre -service graduate students in teacher preparation and educational leadership programmer at Lamar University in the United States of America. Implications for teacher preparation programmes included the ongoing need to assess writing skills and programme supports for student writing throughout the teacher preparation programme. Abbate-Vaughn (2007) reported that a disconnect between teacher education students’ perceptions of their academic writing skills and their actual

performance might indicate the need for program supports throughout teacher preparation and educational leadership programs. In the study Abbate-Vaughn(2007) found that undergraduates were sensitive to faculty grading practices of writing assignments. The students read the teachers' comments about their writing and wanted both positive and negative feedback to apply to future writing assignments. Students preferred a rubric or matrix with grading criteria which indicated an objective or fair approach to assessing writing skills. Students' complaints about faculty grading practices indicated that faculty did not give enough guidance for improvement of future assignments and some faculty "bled red all over" papers with excessive comments.

As Makineni, Olkinuora and Lonka (2004) assert, students from all social groups and several age cohorts participate in the present system of higher education therefore universities are critical to the development of any nation. In the developing nations they are often the only institutions with the capacity for the development of high skilled manpower, technological transfer and generation of new knowledge. Thus, Newsfields (2003) argues that the ability to write in-depth academic essays is widely regarded as one of the hallmarks of higher education. Students make common sentence level errors, their essays lack organisation and features appropriate for academic writing. Sometimes, they focus on grammar at the expense of critical thinking skills. Matthews, Spratt and Dangerfield (1985) argue that students' written work is usually inadequate and for a number of reasons, which include unfamiliarity with the language, or students writing in their first language. These can be attributed to graphical or visual skills, grammatical skills, rhetoric skills and organizational skills. These skills need to be integrated for academic writing, because, according to Matthews et al, (1985:71) 'writing is a special skill that does not spring naturally from an ability to speak a language'

Students at Midlands State University have been schooled through the medium of English, but their writing has been found to be in need of improvement. This has been noted in all end of semester departmental board meetings where lecturers highlight the need for most students to improve on academic writing abilities. It is the Communication Skills Center's expectation that students approach the development of their writing ability as a process that consists of three phases, namely, planning, writing and editing. Students' academic texts should fulfill various conditions like the style condition (a scientific style and register), the language condition (a transparent and precise text with correct syntax and word choice), and the accountability condition (references). Students are expected to plan a well structured text that consists of an introduction, body and conclusion. To this end, academic writing of university students affects their overall achievement because assignments are the means of communication between students and lecturers.

The researcher has been motivated by her experiences as a Teaching Assistant in the Communication Skills Centre at Midlands State University since April 2008 and as a high school teacher at various rural and urban secondary schools since 2000. Such experiences have shown that schools and universities have a blend of students from varying backgrounds and they bring with them different attitudes, language codes and values depending on the socio-economic status of their parents. It is the researcher's interest to find out whether these differences have an effect on students' academic writing ability at university. Furthermore, as a Master of Education student in Educational Sociology, modules such as Sociology of the Classroom, Development and Education and Social Institutions and Education, have prompted me to further look into whether students from different backgrounds write differently in their academic work and

whether the attributes of cultural capital such as parental socio-economic status, occupation and income have an impact on academic writing.

1.3 Statement of the problem

Not much is known with regards the association between cultural capital and the development of academic writing skills among university students in Zimbabwe in general and Midlands State University in particular, hence the need to carry out an investigation

1.4 Research Questions

This research is guided by the following research questions;

1. How does family socio-economic status affect academic writing ability of university students?
2. Is there a link between university students' academic writing skills and the types of secondary schools they attended?
3. Do residential areas where students come from have any link with their academic writing skills?
4. What influence does language have on students' academic writing skills?
- 5 Do students' preferences, values, and attitudes have any effect on their academic writing?

1.5 Assumptions

This research assumes that:

1. Students come to university with prerequisite writing skills that can transfer from general writing to professional writing on demand.

2. Socio-economic status does not affect the academic writing skills of students.
3. High schools attended by students affect their academic writing ability
4. Areas where students come from impact on their academic writing skills
5. Students' preferences, values and attitudes are associated with their academic writing skills.

1.6 Significance of study.

This research is important since it specifically looks at the Midlands State University as an institution and will provide an insight on the academic writing abilities of its students. It might also be of importance to educators as it will explore whether home background affects academic writing ability of university students, hence the need for them to consider such factors with concern. These educators will probably research further on policies and training needs of students. The research will enlighten the researcher both as a Master of Education student and a Teaching Assistant in that, she will be able to develop students' needs and probably help improve students' academic writing ability in the Communication Skills Centre and across the university as a whole. The study will be of interest to those who would want to carry out further research on the association between cultural capital and academic writing skills.

1.7 Limitations

This study, like any other, had its own limitations. There was minimal use of the internet due to constant power cuts. The researcher faced delays in marking of assignments by some lecturers and this slowed the pace of the dissertation. The questionnaires were self-administered, but the response rate was 82%. It could not be ascertained why some students brought them back without responding. Finance was also a limiting factor as it was expensive to print the questionnaires and photocopy students' assignments; therefore, the researcher photocopied only a few.

1.8 Delimitations

The research was conducted from June to October 2010 as the researcher is on a block release programme. The research only looked at the association between cultural capital and academic writing skills, not considering other factors that might be associated with academic writing. It is confined to two faculties due to time and financial constraints and results will be generalized.

1.8 Definition of terms

The terms cultural capital and academic writing were the guiding principles of the research and are briefly defined below.

1.8.1 Cultural capital

Cultural capital is a distinctive explanation for achievement, influenced by Marxism and does not assume that the culture of the higher social classes is in any sense superior to that of the working classes. The high value placed on the dominant culture simply stems from the ability of the powerful to impose their definition of reality on others. Therefore, according to Bourdieu (1979) possession of the dominant culture is cultural capital, because, via the educational system, it can be translated to wealth and power.

1.8.2 Academic writing

Academic writing focuses on persuasion and argumentation which are powerful communicative tools in the real world. In academic writing the author covers the selected topic from an authoritative point of view. Academic writing must be objective and focus should not be on the writer, but on the topic and ideas of the paper. Avoiding abbreviations and slang, both of which may be highly culture –specific is necessary in academic writing Academic writing is designed to be an enriching learning experience. (Fung Lan Yong, 2007) It differs much from school

writing in that it is not the case of more of the same old staff at school which tends to be secondary school versions of description and narration.

1.9 Summary

This chapter identified writing at university as a problem and highlighted Midlands State University as its context of study. Several examples of academic writing at international universities were given, narrowing down to Zimbabwe. This chapter therefore, gave a background to the study, statement of the problem research questions, assumptions significance of the study limitations, delimitations and defined key terms related to the study.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Introduction

The previous chapter gave a background to the study. This chapter reviews literature related to the study .A thematic approach is used, where each research question is looked at in relation to academic writing. Cultural capital, as the conceptual framework of the study is explored fully, and then its attributes analyzed in relation to academic writing. These attributes include students' family socio-economic status, secondary schools attended by students, areas their families reside in and their values attitudes and preferences.

2.2 Conceptual Framework

2.2.1 Cultural Capital

Cultural capital refers to concrete practices and assets that are acquired, enabling people to “generate relations of distinction which are instituted as social or status hierarchies. (Fyfe, 2004). The concept of cultural capital originates out of Bourdieu’s observation in the 1960s that cultural practices such as museum attendance and educational achievements in France are highly associated with education and cultivated taste rather than income. He defined it as a form of knowledge, a cognitive acquisition of artistic knowledge and talent that equip a person with empathy for and aesthetic appreciation of cultural artifacts. It is therefore the production or consumption (or use) of cultural artifacts and aesthetics –visual performing art, music and literature. Cultural capital is multidimensional and for the purposes of this study,its aspects are broken down into socio-economic status, language, schools and preferences ,values and attitudes.

Cultural capital encompasses a large array of linguistic competencies, manners, preferences and orientations which Bourdieu (1979:82) terms “subtle modalities in relation to culture and language” .Bigelow (2006), supports this saying, language is a source of cultural capital. The ability to master English and any other language should be seen as cultural capital. English skills are needed to navigate numerous institutions and systems and for this reason are termed cultural capital. Eyol (2008) says that cultural capital is the property of an individual and may be obtained through socialization, formal education or practice. It consists of high status cultural signals such as attitudes, behaviors, cultural goods and academic credentials that are used for social and cultural exclusion. Therefore cultural capital is manifested in tendencies, use of language, styles of interaction, ethical modes, social skills and self confidence. As Bourdieu (1979) purports ,all these represent symbolic power ,they legitimize high status groups’ claims for recognition, deference, obedience or the service of others, helping them to create and maintain the structural conditions that protect their interests.

Haralambos and Holborn (2008) assert that cultural capital includes the knowledge, skills and competencies an individual possess and their confidence and ability to deploy them. Class is the key determinant to the amount of cultural capital an individual possesses and the habitus of families and school generates different amounts of cultural capital which in turn, influences students’ choice of higher education institutions. Datta (1984:159) posits that “traditional cultures may affect the educability of a child by restricting his level of aspiration, directing it to specific fields and moulding appropriate personality traits” Culture provides the linguistic and analytical categories by means of which learning is mediated. “High status parents are more competent in, and capable of, positively affecting the academic performance of their offspring, as they have more beneficial cultural resources at their disposal than low status parents.” (Starfield, 2007) .They thus exhibit more interest and involvement in their children’s general development

and education which benefits their children's educational career. This performance advantage of high status over low status students is also known as the primary effect of social background

Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital is an attempt to expand the category of capital to something more than just the economic and to identify culture as a form of capital. His concern in relation to cultural capital was its continual transmission and accumulation in ways that perpetuate social inequalities. Bourdieu sees the concept of cultural capital breaking with the received wisdom that attributes academic success or failure to natural aptitudes, such as intelligence and giftedness. He therefore explains school success by the amount and type of cultural capital inherited from the family milieu rather than by measures of individual talent or achievement. For him ability is socially constructed and is the result of individuals having access to large amounts of cultural capital. Ability itself is the product of an investment of time and cultural capital.

Bourdieu identifies three variants of cultural capital. Firstly, in the embodied state incorporated in mind and body. According to Laureau and Weininger (2003), this consists of both the consciously acquired and passively inherited properties of one's self.

Cultural capital is not transmissible instantaneously like a gift or bequest, rather it is acquired over time as it impresses itself upon one's habitus (character and way of thinking), which in turn becomes more effective to or primed to receive similar influences. Linguistic capital, defined as the mastery of and relation to language, can be understood as a form of embodied cultural capital in that it represents a means of communication and self presentation acquired from one's

surrounding culture” (Bourdieu, 1990:14) Secondly, in the objectified state, simply existing as cultural goods such as books, artifacts, dictionaries, and paintings. The objectified state consists of physical objects that are owned, such as works of art. These cultural goods can be transmitted for economic profit. Haralambos and Holborn (2008) say that peoples’ bodies can come to reflect and represent differences in taste. Diet affects body shape, and the way in which one presents themselves can suggest that they are vulgar or distinguished lower class or higher class “While one can possess objectified cultural capital, one can also consume (for example, understand the meaning of a painting) if one has the proper foundation of conceptuality” (Laureau & Weininger 2003:34).

Lastly there is the institutionalized state which consists institutional recognition, most often in the form of academic credentials. Laureau and Weininger (2003) concur with three distinct forms and say cultural capital is acquired in the home and school via exposure to a given set of cultural practices; therefore it has a social origin. The school system transforms the inherited cultural capital into scholastic cultural capital, therefore the latter is predisposed to appear as an individual achievement, for example middle class parents talk to their children at infancy, therefore such children have longer vocabularies when they enter school thus score more highly in standardized tests measuring verbal skills. This means cultural capital has a great impact on English language. Therefore; cultural capital refers to non –financial social assets, for example, educational or intellectual, which might promote social mobility beyond economic means.

According to O’Donnell (1992) Bourdieu concentrates on how middle and working class cultures are reproduced. He argues that schools are middle class institutions, run by middle class people (teachers) in which, in general middle class pupils succeed. Working class culture does not fit well into the demands of such an educational system. In support of his case, he is able to

point to substantial empirical evidence to show that in the United States and the Western European countries middle class children tend to achieve better qualifications and to get better jobs than working class children of equal measured intelligence. Middle class children's values, attitudes and behavior correspond more with teachers' expectations and the demands of the examination system than those of working class children who suffer a cultural deficit. This situation also obtains in Zimbabwe.

However, Bourdieu argues that the failure of the working class children is the fault of the education system, not the working class culture. Each social class possesses its own set of meanings or cultural framework, which is internalized through socialization within the family. Barnard et al, (1994) say the power of the dominant class enables them to impose their own framework of meaning on the school as if it were the only legitimate culture. The dominant class defines what counts as knowledgeable or intelligent activity within the school. Accordingly, working class students find it difficult to make progress within the education system, while students from the dominant class possess the cultural capital required to achieve academic and eventually occupational success.

Therefore, cultural capital was developed to help address a particular empirical problem, namely the fact that "economic obstacles are not sufficient to help explain disparities in the educational attainment of children from different social classes"(Laureau and Weinenger 2003:568). Above and beyond economic factors, "cultural habits and dispositions inherited from the family are fundamentally important to school success" (Bourdieu and Passeron 1979:14). Bourdieu thus emphasized that any competence becomes a capital in so far as it facilitates appropriation of society's cultural heritage but unequally distributed, thereby creating opportunities for exclusive advantages. These advantages stem from the institutionalization of criteria of evaluations in

schools, that is, standards of assessment which are favourable to children from a particular class or classes.

2.3 Socio-economic status and academic writing skills

Ezewu (1983:23) defines socio-economic status as “the social and economic position of an individual or a family in any given society, determined by such factors as the level of education, occupation and income.” It is assumed that the social and economic position of a family in society will affect its values, goals, attitudes, and behavior and determine how the family perceives school education. The students’ cultural contexts are important in academic writing. For example, the education and professions of students parents, as well as the parental income strongly associated with their education, play a role in their academic writing.

Research findings have shown that people of high socio-economic status send their children to school earlier than those of low socio-economic status. They have the means and opportunities of sending their offspring to nursery schools-as a transition from the home to the school-in most cases at the age of five rather than six, which the education policies stipulate and at which age children of parents of low socio-economic status enter school. A study conducted in Kenya revealed that;

wealthier and better educated parents who utilize private nursery schools and who deploy resources in a manner creating preschool conditions which are conducive to a successful school performance provide initial advantages which are difficult to match among the poor ,uneducated and rural Kenyans.(Ezewu 1983:24)

In other words, families with a high socio-economic status prepare their children for school more adequately than those with a low socio-economic status As a result, children coming from

the high socio-economic background often are more ready to learn and consequently stand a better chance of scoring higher averages in their academic writing..

The family sets the lifestyle and influences the life chances of children in the sense that a family may be supportive, neutral or antagonistic to school academic writing. The value which each family attaches to school education determines the motivation with which its children pursue academic writing. In high socio-economic status homes, children are usually prepared for school, rather than prepare on their own. They are encouraged to wake up early, or are woken up and prepared for school. In low socio-economic homes other activities in the home are valued more than schooling and in such homes children are hardly encouraged to attend school. In a study by Ezewu (1983), on why pupils come late to school several reasons were given, including the following; *My mother sent me to fetch water, I was cooking, I did not wake up in time, I had no food to eat, I was bathing my sisters.*

Constant late coming to school is bound to have an adverse effect on academic writing skills because such students do not have enough time to practice...

Datta (1984:150) argues that the imbalance in the use of opportunities for higher education is equally glaring. Available information from a study carried out in Kenya suggest that students with fathers or guardians in non-manual occupational categories in general and professions in particular, are more than proportionately represented at universities throughout the continent. Socio -economic differences lead to distinct patterns of behaviors which are correlated to education “Social strata based on wide disparities in income tend to develop their characteristic patterns of life marked by some or all of the following; residence, house furnishings, food habits and quality of nutrition, kinds and qualities of clothing ,posture ,gesture and general physical bearing as well as patterns of family life...”(Datta 1984:164)

In a longitudinal study in 1964 which followed children throughout their primary school education until they sat the Eleven plus and were sent to different secondary schools in the tripartite school system, Douglas (1964) cited in Ezewu (1984) discovered that working class children have lower average scores and he offers explanations based on the home background, parental attitudes, parents hours of work and interest in their children's schools. Fewer working class parents visit schools on parents' day and it is usually the mother who shows up, whereas middle class parents turn up together and assertively demand their children's educational rights in the elaborated code, seeing the head as well as the teacher. Parental encouragement is seen as a factor in performance and Douglas seems to suggest that this can be measured by a positivist type of proof. Macious (2005) asserts that parents of a higher social standing transmit a different cultural capital to their children, teaching them to express their individuality and imagination more freely. According to Barnard (1994:155) "this study and another influential but smaller scale study by Jackson and Marsden in the 1940s and 1950s formed the backdrop for arguments which suggest that, it is home background and particularly parental participation in education, which explains working class under attainment in academic writing. Marcius (2005) argues that "privilege, then begets privilege--- as family life reproduces the class structure in each generation"

Douglas (1964) also carried out a longitudinal study following educational careers of 5,362 British children born in the first week of March 1946 through primary and of secondary school up to age 16 in 1962. Douglas divided the students into four social class groupings and found significant variations in the educational attainment between students of similar ability but from different social class systems. Douglas also attached importance to the child's early years, since, in many cases performance during the first years of schooling is reflected throughout the

secondary school into higher education. During primary socialization, middle class children receive greater attention and stimulus from their parents and this forms the basis for high achievement scores in academic writing

Feinstein's (2003) more recent research which used data from National Child Development Study of 1958 and the British Cohort Study of 1970 claimed that the degree of parental interest and support influenced educational attainment. Class differences in parental support account for class differences in academic writing. Parental support is measured by the teachers assessment of how much interest parents showed in their children's writing. However a critique on Feinstein research shows there is need for caution as Feinstein himself admits "parental attitudes are influenced by their economic and social position and moreover, deprivation does have a direct effect on attainment" (Haralambos 2008:630). Working class parents have less time to attend school activities because of the demands of their jobs. Manual jobs involve longer and less regular hours than non- manual jobs

.To sum it all, Datta (1984) says that usually working class families are large and it is assumed that the larger the family the less attention the mother can give to her children. Most working class childrens' conditions of living are deplorable. They live in crowded homes which are poorly furnished and have little to offer in terms of imaginative play. Usually, food available is often insufficient and nutritionally unbalanced and clothes available. This affects academic writing ability greatly.

However, critics argue that 'if the state provided spacious homes with quiet places for children to study, a well stocked library ..., educational outings, computer programmes and parents who can spend a lot of time supplementing education and motivating their children, then everyone would go to university and earn enough to provide things for their children.'"(Barnard et al

1994:156)They further go on to say that critics argue that what is happening is a culture clash. Speech codes and parents' educational achievement, attitudes and so on differ according to class. The culture of the working class is at odds with that of the school and society. Their interests and valued skills are ignored and even given low status. There is also a point that behind the statistics, there are a number of possible but unexplored interpretations of parental involvement in their children's academic writing abilities such as lack of money for baby sitters, shift working or previous humiliation by teachers in their own schooling, none of which necessarily means that parents are not concerned about or involved in their children's education.

2. 4 Linguistic usage and academic writing

Many prominent researchers such as Cope & Kalantzis , 2000) and Johns (1997) have pointed out that learners can achieve social access and inclusion through a facility with language and writing. "Achieving proficiency in writing requires explicit pedagogy in grammar and lexis and is important because one's linguistic repertoire and writing skills often determine one's social, economic and political choice". (Hinkel 2006:124).(Celce-Murcia ,200 and Christie ,1998) have similarly argued that a lack of instruction in second language grammar and lexis disadvantages second language learners in their vocational, academic and professional careers and ultimately reduces their options. These researchers have continued to emphasise the importance of language quality in second language writing because grammar and lexis are inextricable from meaning in written discourse and because second language writers are ultimately evaluated based on their control of language and text construction in their written discourse. Frodesen (2001) in (Celce-Murcia2001,233) states that "the wholesale adoption of first language composition theories and practices for second language writing classes seems

misguided in the light of the many differences between first and second language writers ,processes and products”.

Bernstein (1961) suggested that class differences in speech patterns are related to academic writing. Speech is an important medium of communication and learning and attainment levels in schools may be related to differences in speech patterns. Bernstein (1961) argues that working class children and middle class teachers often communicate ineffectively because of different language codes. The argument revolves around the two types of languages in use which are the foreign(English) and indigenous (Shona and Ndebele) and the way the education system expects one to express oneself using only one. According to Barnard (1994) there are two codes. The restricted code is abbreviated, less grammatical, punctuated by ums, ers, you knows and body language. Total explicit detail is unnecessary as everyone knows what one is talking about. Bernstein suggests this code is used by middle and working class people, particularly children and adolescents. Most youth cultures and each teenage generation have their own slang words, often a code to shut out the older generation. Middle class children also have access to elaborated code, which is used more by their parents .It is more detailed and elaborated upon giving references to all things which are needed for a full understanding .The user of the elaborated code does not take it for granted that you know what they are talking about, and so they explain in depth. Middle class parents use elaborated code when talking to their children, and explain and reason with them. They are expected to respond in the same way. Working class parents use restricted code themselves and their children therefore have no experience of elaborated code, except from their teachers at school.

Barnard etal (1994) say that Bernstein showed children cartoon pictures which told a story and asked them to write down what was happening Children used to the elaborated code could write

the story in full detail, so that the pictures were not needed in order to understand what was happening. Working class children only wrote the bare bones of the story and the pictures were vital to get an understanding. Bernstein also used interviews to discuss various ideas, the so called abstract concepts like religion or truth. Students with restricted codes were supposedly unable express ideas like this on the same way as those using elaborated code yet ability to use abstractions is important in intellectual training. Bernstein's argument is that anyone who comes to school without the expected speech code will only have limited success. Students who use restricted code are usually unable to cope with the so-called 'high-status writing. The schools use elaborated codes because heads and teachers are middle class. Education is geared towards a middle class definition of what intelligence is

Haralambos and Holborn (2008) say that Bernstein gave the examples of stories told by two five year olds, one from a middle class background and another from the working class background .The children were given four pictures on which to base their story .In the first, several boys were playing football. In the second, the boy breaks a window .The third shows a woman looking out of the window and a man making a threatening gesture in the boys' direction .The fourth shows the boys retreating from the scene .Using an elaborated code to spell the details in the picture, the middle class child describes and analyses the relationships between the objects, events and participants and his or her story can be understood by the reader without the aid of pictures. The working class child ,using a restricted code ,leaves any of his or her meanings unspoken and the reader would require the pictures to make sense of the story .This story therefore is tied to a particular context ,whereas the first story is free from context and can be understood with no knowledge of the situation in which it was created Bernstein does not say working class code is substandard or inadequate .he describes them as visible and available expression of that culture

therefore linguistic and cultural competence cannot be separated Halliday suggests that the form of oral and written language is influenced directly by the social context in which language is generated. As such the theory predicts that specific language forms result from using language in a specific way. Datta (1984) supports this saying the home and language are likely to expose the student to certain attitudes ,values (which are defined as the basic principles in life which guide our thought and action) and levels of aspiration (Pellegra and Galda ,1986:202). Canale (1983:36) on communicative competence, argues for a theoretical framework that includes the following areas of knowledge and skill :,that is grammatical competence(mastery of the language code-verbal and non-verbal):socio-linguistic competence –the extent to which utterances care produced and understood appropriately in different socio-linguistic contexts as governed by contextual factors such as status of participants, purpose and conventions of interaction”.

Barnard etal (1994) say that critics argue against Bernstein’s theory. Labov(1969)argued that interviewing working class children in a formal situation ,using a middle class interviewer was likely to embarrass or restrict them .Labov’s interviews ,conducted in a more relaxed setting presented different results. When they felt confident and secure ,students would express their views on abstractions without any problem ,often being articulate .If middle class teachers only listened to the ideas articulated by students who are the best users of middle-class patterns, then the ideas ,views and potential of working class students are undervalued.

2.5. Secondary schools attended and academic writing

Bourdieu (1973) claims that the success of all school education depends fundamentally on the education previously accomplished in the earliest years in life Education in school merely builds on this basis, it does not start from scratch but assumes prior skills and prior knowledge Children from the dominant classes have internalized these skills and knowledge during their pre-school

years They possess the keys to unlock the messages transmitted in the classroom, they possess the code of the message. Ball, Bower and Gewirtz (1995:45), in a study of fifteen schools in neighboring local education areas in England, found out that middle class parents “are exploiting the market in education and bringing their social and cultural advantages to bear”. They are in a better position than working class parents to ensure that their children go to a school of their choice .They possess more cultural capital and are more likely to have the knowledge and contacts to” play the system”. Such parents use strategies like multiple applications, visiting head teachers, researches and visiting schools. They can also identify the best schools and find places for their children in those schools. The more skilled the chooser, the more cultural capital they have. They are more able to decipher the subtler cultural messages provided by the school about its ethos .They have an advantage in identifying the best schools as well as in trying to find places for their children in them. They are more likely to be able to afford to move house to the immediate catchments area of a successful school with a good reputation Also they are more likely to afford extra help or coaching to get children into extra lesson.

“When partnerships are developed between family and the educator, instruction becomes more effective”(Gee1990; 24). The notion of cultural capital holds that students’ academic achievements are shaped by the family’s and the school’s social and cultural resources. Fletcher (2009) argues that literacy is culturally bound Families and the community play a critical role in academic development. Successful literacy instruction builds on the knowledge and understanding that student bring to the learning environment from their diverse cultural and language

In their study on academic standards in South African universities and proposals for quality assurance, Strydom and Noruwana(1993 purport that differences among students at universities

can be observed. The majority of students who make it to university suffer from a legacy of inadequate schooling. Most of these students have studied in overcrowded classrooms where a teacher pupil ratio of 1:60 as opposed to 1:20 at “A” stream schools was the rule rather the exception, where the majority of teachers are under qualified for the subjects they teach, where most basic technological supports to learning such as overhead projectors, are not available., where required textbooks are not available to students for most the year. In these schools, recreational facilities are almost non existent; there are teacher shortages and they experience lack of facilities such as laboratories and adequately stocked libraries. The lack of science and mathematics teachers also places these subjects out of the reach of students

Strydom (1993) further goes on to say that students who have studied at schools with such deficiencies and backlogs, enter university at a disadvantage. They will not have received adequate preparation even in those subjects they have studied. But, even more important, they will not have been given the skills to cope with a demanding university curriculum. Therefore the problems universities students bring with them into university affect the way in which universities mediate learning and influence their subject choices. Universities therefore have to mount academic support programmes to assist students in bridging the gap between inadequate schooling and university studies hence the introduction of bridging courses, which courses taken at university are meant to develop student’s conceptual understanding to a stage where they can enter a full fledged university programme in the content area studied.

In the study by Ball et al ,cited by Haralambos and Holborn (2008), working class parents lack cultural capital and material advantages which enable many middle class parents to influence which secondary schools they want their children to attend. Many working class parents preferred to send their children to the nearest schools because of a “complex pattern of family

demands and structural limitations They want their children to go to a school which is easily accessible and does not involve long and dangerous journeys: a school where friends', neighbors and relatives children also go: a school which is part of their community, their locality." In Ball's terms, they want their children to attend a school which is in tune with the habitus of their background. Haralambos and Holborn (2008:635) Ball (1981) further go on to say that middle class parents have maids and this gives them time to take their older children to more distant schools, and to visit schools so that they can make an informed choice about which school they want their children to attend .They can also afford to pay for transport or have cars to ferry their children to school. They are also more likely to possess the financial means and willingness to provide their wards with books and the necessary school materials Some families have a standard formula for spending a proportion of their income on these aspects of their children's schooling.

According to Ezewu(1983:25) "in many countries of the world some schools –and even universities are more prestigious than others and so they attract the best qualified teachers and receive a the attention of government. In our country, most schools established by the Rhodesia government for their children are still prestigious .Several mission schools also fall under this category.

As Ezewu further establishes ,observations in Nigeria and research findings elsewhere,have shown that the prestigious schools un many countries are usually attended by children from high socio-economic status .A study conducted by Adde-Mensah in Ghana showed that in the admission into Ghana's ten most prestigious secondary between 1968 and 1970 ,43.5% of places went to children of high socio-economic status,27.3%went to children of middle and low income families ,while only 14.4%went to children of farmers ,even though the farmers constituted more than 57% of the total lab our force in Ghana. This is possible because high socio-economic

status families, in order to maintain their status, do everything possible to ensure that their children attend the best nursery and primary schools which guarantee admission into highly placed secondary schools, the entrance to which is usually competitive. These highly placed secondary schools provide the best routes to university education, thus guaranteeing access to higher education and consequently access to prestigious occupation and high income from their pupils. In this way, children from high socioeconomic status families are likely to retain that status themselves and to pass it on to their offspring.

There are several barriers to learning on working class students. Their parents are unable to afford school uniforms, trips transport to and from school, classroom materials and textbooks. They also fail to provide private tuition and usually there are no computers at home, let alone the internet, educational toys and space to do homework, rather a comfortable well heated home. This contradicts with well resourced schools in affluent areas. These barriers will reduce rather than increase opportunities for children from poor families, by concentrating socially disadvantaged children in a limited number of increasingly unpopular schools.

2.6 Preferences, values and attitudes and academic writing

These can generally be called the habitus. Haralambos and Holborn (2008:625) define the habitus as “an infinite capacity for generating products –thoughts, perceptions, expressions and actions-whose limits are set by the historically and socially situated conditions of its production.”

The habitus therefore refers to lifestyles, values, dispositions, expectations of particular social groups. It consists of the subjective ways in which different classes understand and perceive the world, and the sort of taste and preferences that they have. A particular habitus is developed through experience. Individuals learn what to expect out of life, how likely they are to succeed in different projects, how others will respond to them if they behave in particular ways and so on.

The habitus of each group is different because different social groups have different experiences. Individuals are not total captives of the habitus, they are free to act as they choose but it tends to lead them towards making certain choices regarding certain types of behavior as normal. The habitus is closely linked to taste, which in turn is closely linked to education.

People's tastes, for example in films, arts, music and food are related to upbringing and education. Bourdieu (1977) in Haralambos and Holborn (2008:625) claims that "there is a very close relationship linking cultural practices (or corresponding opinions) to educational capital (measured by qualification) and secondarily to social origin (measured by father's occupation)". Legitimate taste has the greatest prestige and it includes serious classical music and fine art. Middlebrow taste consists of minor works of the arts and popular taste includes light music or music devalued by popularization. Through upbringing and education, people learn to be able to express good taste. Good taste on its own does not guarantee educational success but it helps, for example, it helps one to get into the most prestigious schools, also shapes the teachers' perceptions of their pupils. Such tastes are not part of formal curriculum, but they play an important role in giving those from higher class backgrounds more chance of success. Social inequality is reproduced in the educational system and as a result it is legitimated. The privileged position of the dominant classes is justified by educational success, while the underprivileged position of the lower class is legitimated by educational failure. Haralambos and Holborn (2008:25) purport that "research shows that the higher a person's social class the higher their academic writing ability is likely to be. Class differences in educational attainment are wide, longstanding and show no signs of disappearing."

The habitus of the working class reflects their lack of money and their everyday struggle to make ends meet. Bourdieu claims that the working class is not particularly concerned about the

aesthetic merits of household objects. It does not matter to them if things around the house do not look nice so long as they are affordable and do the job they were bought for. On the other hand the habitus, of the higher classes reflect economic security and the greater range of choices available to them. Success in cultural field can bring economic success and so change the habitus. However, according to Bourdieu, dominant groups can, to a large extent use their control over culture and what is considered good taste to maintain their positions and pass it on to their children, and devalue cultures that do not stem from the habitus. Therefore the process of social reproduction is largely secured through a process of symbolic violence, a process of cultural reproduction. Those from culturally disadvantaged classes are, by and large, kept in their place by cultural means”(Haralambos and Holborn 2008:68)

Haralambos and Holborn (2008) further go on to say that there is a cultural capital related to lifestyles and the consumption associated with different lifestyles. Even in areas as mundane as eating and dressing, different classes distinguish themselves from one another through their differences in taste. Higher classes tend to prefer food which is light ‘ ‘delicate’, ‘refined’, whereas the lower classes favour the ‘heavy, the fat and the coarse’. Expensive or rare meat and fresh fruit and vegetables popular with higher classes. Teachers, who have plenty of cultural capital but less economic capital, favour the exotic or original cooking which can be purchased at low cost. (Haralambos and Holborn (2008:67)

2.7. SUMMARY

This chapter described cultural capital as the conceptual framework of the study and explored attributes of cultural capital which are socio-economic status, residences, secondary schools attended as well as values, preferences and attitudes of students. These, attributes impact on academic writing attainment of students as they are affected by social factors in the education

system in order to excel A student from a low social status family is deprived in terms of exposure, that is, where he/she lives the type of school he/she attends and this influences their values, attitudes and preferences hence academic writing. ,

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

Chapter 2 reviewed literature related to the study. This chapter focuses on research methodology that was used to carry out the study. It focuses on the research design, population, sample, research instruments, data collection procedures, data management and data analysis.

3.2 Research Design

According to McMillan and Schumaker (1993:59), a research design refers to “the researcher’s plan of how to proceed”. Masuku (1999:25) posits that “a research design is a process of planning and organizing components that comprise the research study. At the most general level, it means all the issues involved in planning and executing a research project, from identifying the problem through to reporting and publishing the results. (Punch 1998:66). Punch (1998) further goes on to say, by contrast, at its most specific level, the design of a research refers to the way a researcher guards against and tries to rule out alternative interpretations of results. Research design is the basic plan for a piece of work and includes four main ideas. These are strategy, conceptual framework, who or what is to be studied as well as tools and procedures to be used for collecting and analyzing empirical materials. Therefore, design sits between the research questions and the data, showing how research questions will be connected to the data, what tools and procedures to use in answering them, thus it needs to follow from the questions and fit in with the data. Research design therefore refers to overall plans for collecting data in order to answer research questions. In this study, a case study was used as a strategy.

3.2.1 Case study

Miles and Huberman in Punch (1998:252) define a case as a “phenomenon of some sort occurring in a bounded context. Thus, the case may be an individual, or a role, or a small group, or an organization, or a community, or a nation. It could also be a decision, or a policy, or a process ...” A case is often thought of as a constituent member of a target population. This research is a single case study, focusing in-depth on Midlands State University as a context. Punch (1998) says a case study aims to understand the case in depth, and in its natural setting, recognizing its complexity and its context This is supported by Gomm, Hammersly and Foster (2002) who say that a case study investigates cases in considerable depth, and researchers construct cases out of naturally occurring social situations and capture the cases in their uniqueness. It has a holistic focus, aiming to preserve and understand the wholeness and unity of the case. Good and Hart in Punch (1998) say the case study then, is not a specific technique, it is a way of organizing social data so as to preserve the unitary character of the social object being studied. Wisker (2008:216) assert that a case study offers an opportunity to consider a situation, individual events, groups, organizations or whatever is appropriate as the object of study. It is a strategy for doing research which involves an empirical investigation of a particular contemporary phenomenon in its real life context using multiple sources of evidence This is supported by Gomm et al (2002) who say that if research is to be of value to people, it needs to be framed in the same terms as the everyday experiences through which they learn about the world firsthand. Multiple sources of data and multiple data collection methods are likely to be used, for example, observations, interviews, questionnaires and numerical data.

Marshall and Rossman (2006:56) posit that “a case study, the most complex strategy, may entail multiple methods interviews, observations, document analysis, and even survey” Case studies are

less intimate than those involving participant observations which foster close relationships.” Marshall and Rossman (2008:164) say “Reports of research on a specific organization, program, or a process (or some set of these) are often called case studies”. A rich tradition of community studies, organized research and program evaluations, documents the illustrative power of research that focuses in depth and in detail on specific instances of a phenomenon. Case studies take the reader into the setting with a vividness and detail not typically present in more analytic reporting formats. Therefore it is an empirical inquiry that investigates a phenomenon within its real life context.

3.3 Population and sample

3.3.1 Population

Chiromo(2006) defines a population as all individuals, units, objects or events that will be considered in a research project .The population of this study will be 489 Level one Semester one students from the Faculties of Arts and Social Sciences who are doing Communication Skills and 18 lecturers from the Communication Skills Centre.

3.3.2 Sample

A sample is that part of a population which is to be used to carry out the actual study. As Punch (1998:66) says,” we cannot study everyone, everywhere, doing everything. Even a case study will require sampling within the case” Chiromo (2006) says it is not always possible or practical to study the whole population and so we study some members of the population and use the information gained to infer to the whole population. This is due to factors of expense, time and accessibility. Fraenkel and Wallen (2003:97) say a sample in a research study refers to any group on which information is obtained. They further go on to say that a sample should be as large as

the researcher can obtain with a reasonable expenditure of time and energy. However, O'Donnel (1992) argues that the sample should be as representative as possible of the members of the sampling frame and of the relevant population. It is not always the case of the larger the better. The right size of the sample varies according to the population being surveyed and the issue being researched. The sample of this study will be 117 students from the Faculties of Arts and Social Sciences and 4 lecturers from the Communication Skills Centre.

3.3.2 (i) Sampling procedures

Fraenkel and Wallen (2003:106) argue that sampling is a process in which certain subgroups or strata are selected for the sample in the same proportion as they exist in the population. There are two categories of sampling procedures, namely probability and non –probability sampling. In probability sampling, the chance of selecting each respondent is known or can be calculated (Chiromo 2006). White (2005:117) say probability sampling is “one in which each person has the same known chance of being selected” “In non-probability sampling, the probability of selection is unknown.”(Chiromo 2006:18). Stratified random sampling which falls under the probability sampling technique will be used in this study. Therefore the selection process is predetermined and once the units have been selected, the goal is to collect data from them all. Masuku (1999:49) posits, stratified random sampling is when there is proportionate representation of the subject groups in the sample.” This is because stratified sampling can be used in document analysis and stratification ensures that the sample is representative of the students in terms of sex. The population of all students in the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences was divided into homogenous a group, that is males and females, using computerized class registers. The divisions will be done on the respective departments within the Faculties, for example, English, Archaeology, African Languages in the Arts and Media and Psychology in the

Social Sciences. Then 20% of the population from each department in the faculty will be taken as sample, for example, if African Languages has 90 students then 20% will be selected randomly using the hat system meaning 12 students would be the sample, 6 males and 6 females. For lecturers, 2 males and 2 females were randomly selected

3.4 Research Instruments

The whole process of preparing to collect data is called instrumentation. It involves not only the selection or design of the instruments, but also the procedures and the conditions under which the instruments will be administered (Fraenkel & Wallen 2003:119).

Best and Khan (1992:226) say research instruments are “the tools that are used to collect data for the research study. Thus any data collecting device used in the study or tools used to collect data for the research are research instruments It is not about developing a good instrument only but considering what type of data the instrument will provide under the provided conditions As Fraenkel and Wallen (2002:118) assert that “the most highly regarded of instruments will provide useless data if, for instance, is administered incorrectly by someone disliked by respondents under noisy inhospitable conditions or when subjects are exhausted.”

For the purposes of this study, questionnaires, interviews and document analysis were used to gather data.

3.4.1 Questionnaires

Questionnaires are the most commonly used and commonly abused data gathering techniques. Chiromo (2006:24) defines questionnaires as “that form of inquiry which contains a systematically compiled and organized series of questions that are sent to the population sample” This view is shared by Fraenkel & Wallen (2003) who refer to questionnaires as “written

interviews” The researcher produces a document to be used and hopefully understood by the respondent Basically, a questionnaire must serve two purposes, which are, to translate research objectives into specific questions and motivate the respondents to cooperate with the survey and furnish information correctly. Part of the questionnaires would require answers on a scale, they are closed and the other part would be open ended.

Open and closed questions were asked According to Fraenkel & Wallen (2003) open questions allow the respondent to select his or her own answer from a number of options They allow for more individualized responses though these may be difficult to interpret and hard to score since so many different kinds of responses are received. Gilbert (2001) asserts that open questions allow individuals to respond in any way they want. Closed questions are easy to use, score, code for analysis saving time and money. However though they are standardized they are somewhat more difficult to write than open ended. Also, there is a possibility that an individuals’ true response is not present among the options given therefore the researcher should present another option. This research combined both formats of questions though closed questions are more preferable.

Questionnaires are practical in this study in that they have usability. They are easy to administer as this can be done during lecture time and they are easy to score and interpret results. Again researchers elsewhere have not encountered problems in their use.

McMillan and Schumacher (1993:238) say “a questionnaire is relatively economical”, therefore questionnaires were used in this study because they are not very expensive to compile and as a result, a lot of questions can be used to gather information from various respondents. If well constructed, they are also reliable. Good questions evoke truth and should accommodate all possible answers. There is greater anonymity since no names are used. Respondents can provide

confidential information, in this case they gave their registration numbers which is also permanent and can be constantly referred to. Questionnaires are appropriate for this study because respondents had the same questions to answer and it would be easy to compare, contrast and analyze the data, as they enable ease of quantification

However the use of questionnaires did not give the researcher room to probe further on responses given, even if they needed clarification Sometimes respondents' present misleading information for the sake of pleasing the researcher leading to biased findings. Some respondents are not forthcoming to respond or give vague or ambiguous responses. In light of this the researcher presented questions that are not sensitive, so that honest answers and opinions are given.

3.4.2 Document Analysis

Gilbert (2001:196) says documents are things that we can read and which relate to some aspect of the social world. They are written or printed materials that have been produced in some form or another. Fraenkel & Wallen (2003:482) say, "it is the analysis of written contents of communication." It is a technique that enables researchers to study human behavior in an indirect way, through the analysis of their communication .It is just as the name implies: the analysis of usually but not necessarily written contents of a communication. A person's conscious and unconscious beliefs, attitudes values and ideas are ideas are often revealed in communication.

According to information available on www.gmu.ac document analysis is the systematic examination of instructional documents such as syllabi and assignments in order to identify instructional needs and challenges and describe the instructional activity. The focus of the analysis should be critical examination, rather than a mere description of the documents.

In this study, assignments are the purposeful document to be used and are meant to be read as objective statements of fact telling us about the values, interests and purposes of student separated by time, geographic locale or culture. According to van Dyk et al (2008) this is an academic literacy intervention Fraenkel & Wallen (2003) equate this to performance instruments. A performance instrument includes any device designed measure either a process or a product. Procedures are ways of doing things such as writing an essay. Products are end results of procedure, for example a well written essay. Performance instruments are designed to see whether and how well procedures can be followed to assess the quality of products. One assignment set by the centre board was administered as per communication skills centre requirements

Documentary research remains an important research tool in its own right, as well as being an invaluable part of most schemes of triangulation (Gilbert 2001). Many early sociologists like Marx, Durkheim and Weber used documentary research.

In document analysis everything must be checked from more than one angle thus triangulation. Nothing can be taken for granted, In this instance, questionnaires and interviews were used as triangulation. Document analysis can be used to describe trends in schooling and in this instance it is to infer patterns in students' grammatical and stylistic errors. Such analysis will thus provide more specific information as to how frequently different kinds of mistakes appear.

In this study, a method proposed by Gilbert (2001) was used to evaluate and interpret the assignments as documents. These were grouped under four headings namely authenticity, credibility, representativeness and meaning. Authenticity looks at whether the document makes sense and if there is consistency of literary style as well as whether the assignment derives from a reliable source. Credibility looks at who produced the assignment and in what context.

Assignments are credible as they are presented as part of course requirements hence are assured of quality. Representativeness identifies what is missing and why and finally meaning looks at how the student expresses him/herself.

Document analysis was of great importance to this study because assignments gave a more explicit picture of how students perform academically as they are more reliable and consistent. With regards both time and resources, logistics were relatively simple as the assignments were collected from students, marked and returned to them. It is unobtrusive and the researcher could observe assignments without being observed, since the contents being analyzed were not influenced by the researcher's presence.

Document analyses are more time consuming in terms of administration and marking and also require commitment in marking. It is formal and systematic which lends structure to the research and can give a good overview of the research. If critics disagree with my interpretation of the data they must still address the findings I would have presented. Data is limited to what already exists. However, replication of study by other researchers is possible because data are readily available and almost always can be returned to if necessary or desired.

Therefore, in this study, for ethical considerations, the researcher was in no way involved in student assessment of assignments. Assignments were marked by respective lecturers in the different departments in the Faculties to allow objectivity and avoid bias. The researcher was involved in data analysis using the assignments marked by colleagues following the departmental guidelines.

3.4.3 Interviews

Interviewing is the most important data collection technique a qualitative researcher possesses. The purpose of interviewing people is to find out what is on their minds, what they think or how they feel about something. "Interviewing is the careful asking of relevant questions meant to check the accuracy of –to verify or refute –the impressions he/she has gained through observation."(Fraenkel and Wallen 1996:456)This study used structured interviews which are verbal questionnaires consisting of a series of questions designed to elicit specific answers on the part of respondents. They are rather formal and are often used to obtain information that can be later compared and contrasted.

As Gilbert (2003) asserts, interviews need to provide some form of document to guide questioning, which may consist both precoded and open ended questions. The interview guide was used for focused interview, listing areas to be covered while leaving the exact wording and order of questions to the interviewer. The possibility of non-directive interviewing was considered, where the interviewee's replies determined the course of the interview

Interviews were used in this study as they give the researcher room to meet one on one with the subjects of the research .They can provide both the detailed information one sets to out to collect and in this instance ,through lecturers the researcher will get to know more about the problems students face in academic writing. Interview questions will be on the experiences of the lecturers and this will supplement information provided by questionnaires and assignments therefore providing triangulation. A structured interview will be used, where a series of designed questions were used on the lecturers pertaining student ability in academic writing

The interviews provided a better opportunity to estimate validity of answers as the interviewer could observe not only what the respondent said but how they said it. Cooperation levels were high allowing the interviewer to ask supplementary questions, further probing the interviewee to go further. Also in interviews, there is less chance that someone other than the expected respondent will answer the questionnaire.

Interviews are however time consuming in terms of making appointments with the respondent and conducting the interview itself. They need a composed and well organized interviewer who can relate well with the respondent. How the interviewer introduces and carries him has an impact on the respondent.

3.5. Data Collection Procedures

Murimba and Moyo (1995) purport that data collection procedures are “the sequential steps in the collection of data.” It should reveal steps taken by the researcher. Data was collected through the use of document analysis, questionnaires and interviews. The purpose of using document analysis was to assess students’ scores, therefore lecturers who teach various departments marked their students’ assignments and the researcher analysed the marks. Questionnaires were distributed with the purpose of finding demographic details of students as well as attributes of cultural capital, such as parental occupation, education and the types of schools students attended. The researcher asked for time from the lecturers during their lectures, to distribute questionnaires to students who filled them in and returned them. Interviews were conducted with lecturers in order to gather information on how students perform and what the lecturers think of student performance. 97 questionnaires were returned, all 97 students wrote the assignment and 4 lecturers were interviewed.

Pretesting

Questionnaires were pre-tested on 5 students from the faculty of Science to reveal ambiguities, poorly worded questions and questions that are not understood and to test clarity of instruction. This will enhance reliability and validity of the questionnaire. The students' assignments were collected and a comparison of information provided on both was done

3.6. Data Management.

Data was stored in the form of both hardcopies and softcopies. As the researcher worked on various chapters, she saved each chapter on the machine and printed it as well, for safekeeping. Questionnaires were printed and kept, two interviews were done while recording on the phone, while notes were also written for the other two. A few of the students' assignments were photocopied and kept. For backup and storage, most of what was done was kept as softcopy and hardcopy.

3.7 Data Analysis

The researcher tried to respond to most questions on the questionnaire and interview guide either one by one or at times collectively by linking those that go together. Data were presented through tables' pie charts and narration. Assignments were analyzed basing on the communication skills centre marking guide. Frequency tables were drawn showing the frequencies in which several marks appear and which types of students would have obtained that score. An analysis of how often each score appears was done to see if the marks correlate with what the lecturers say. The mean and mode of the students' marks were also worked out, considering which students would have scored these marks, basing on questionnaire analysis of the amount of cultural capital they possess.

3.8 Summary

This chapter has looked into at the research design, the population which included all level one semester one students in the faculties of Arts and Social Sciences, the sample and data collection instruments which included the questionnaires, interviews and document analysis. The chapter also focused on data collection procedures and data analysis.

Chapter Four

Results/Presentation, Analysis and Discussion

4.1 Introduction

Chapter 3 outlined the research methodology that informed this study. This chapter presents data that were collected in order to answer the following research questions;

- How does socio-economic status affect academic writing ability of students?
- Is there a link between university students' academic writing skills and the types of secondary schools they attended?
- Do residential areas where students come from have any link with their academic writing skills?
- What influence does language have on students' academic writing ability?
- Do students' preferences, values and attitudes have any effect on their academic writing skills?

In this chapter, data from questionnaires are presented first, followed by data from interviews. These data are correlated with average assignment score marks.

4.2 Presentation and analysis of findings.

Demographic details on students and lecturers will be presented first, followed by a score analysis of marks from assignments, then a presentation of findings basing on each research question.

4.2.1 Demographic details

4.2.1.1 Student Enrolment and Return Rate of Data Collection Instruments.

The population division between male and female students who enrolled in the Faculties of Arts and Social Sciences in the August to December 2010 semester is shown in Table 4.1. The research was stratified, therefore gender related bias should be taken into account in result interpretation.

Table 4.1 Contingency Table showing Enrolment of Students in the Faculties of Arts and Social Sciences.

Faculty	Conventional		Parallel		Grand Total		
	F	M	F	M	F	M	Total
Arts	58	53	89	79	147	132	279
Social Sciences	59	45	96	60	155	105	260
Total	117	98	185	139	302	237	539

Source: Student Records. MSU (accessed 12/08/10)

In relation to the population shown in Table 4.1, the sample distribution of student respondents was also done by gender as shown in Table 4.2.

Table 4.2 Distribution of Student Respondents by Gender and Faculty.

Respondents	Arts	%	Social Sciences	%	Total
Males	27	27.8	18	18.8	45
Females	26	26.8	26	26.8	52
Total	53		44		97

It is worth noting that 46.4% of responses came from males and 53.6% from females. In the Faculty of Arts, there is a gender balance in the sample, with the number of females almost being equal to that of males. However, the Faculty of Social Sciences shows a gender imbalance with more female respondents than males.

4.2.1.2 Age of Student Respondents

The study also investigated the age of student respondents and the results are shown in Table 4.3.

Table 4.3 Ages of Student Respondents

Age Range (years)	Frequency	%
17-20	46	47.4
21-24	40	41.2
25-28	8	8.2
Above 28	3	3
Total	97	

As shown in Table 4.3, the majority of the students fall within the 17-20 age range, followed by the 21-24 then 25-28 and finally above 28.

4.2.1.3 Return Rate of Data Collection Instruments.

Data collected by questionnaires included (n=117) students from (n=2) faculties. Altogether, of the 117 questionnaires sent, 97 were returned, resulting in an 82% return rate.

4.2.1.4 Age of lecturer respondents

The researcher also interviewed lecturers and Table 4.4 shows their ages.

Table 4.4 Ages of Lecturer Respondents

Age Range	Total number
25-30	1
31-35	1
36-40	1
Above 40	1

Table 4.4 shows that lecturers are equally distributed among the age groups given.

2.1.5 Teaching experience at university and teaching loads of lecturers

Of the lecturers interviewed, three of them have served the university for two years while one has been there for ten years. Three of them teach Communication Skills in the Faculties of Arts and Social Sciences while one teaches in the Faculty of Commerce.

4.2.2 Score Analysis

Having given the demographic details of respondents, a score analysis of the students' assignments is presented. The score analysis was used to measure students' academic writing skills. The score average can be correlated to the assignment averages relating to each research question, thereby showing the relationship between each research question and academic writing skills. Table 4.5 shows the score analysis.

Table 4.5 An Analysis of Scores obtained by Students.

Raw Score	Frequency	Summation
22	1	22
21	1	21
20	3	60
19	3	57
18	3	54
17	10	170
16	13	208
15	16	240
14	13	182
13	7	91
12	14	168

11	6	66
10	3	30
9	1	9
8	2	16
6	1	6
Total	97	1400

Mean for the Scores

The mean for the scores is:

$$= \underline{14.43}$$

The mean provides the average score obtained by students. Calculating the mean is of importance in that it uses all the information in the distribution, since every score is used in calculating it. However the mean can be influenced by extreme scores.

Mode

The mode is the score that occurs most frequently in a distribution. It is located by inspection rather than computation. From the score analysis, the most frequently occurring score is 15, which means the majority of the students got $15/25$.

Median

The median is a point (not necessarily a score) in an array, above and below which one half of the scores fall. It is a measure of position rather than magnitude and is frequently found by inspection rather than by calculation. In this case the mode is 15

4.2.3 Analysis by Research Questions

The study investigated the association between socio-economic status, secondary schools attended by students, residences, language, values, preferences and attitudes, and academic writing skills. A presentation of the results obtained is given.

4.2.3.1 Socio-economic status and academic writing skills.

How does socio-economic status affect academic writing ability of university students?

In this regard, results for parental occupation, level of education and income as found in the study are given.

Parental occupation

The study investigated the relationship between parental occupation and academic writing skills of students. Fathers and mothers occupations are presented separately. The term guardian was also used as substitute for fathers or mothers .Results on fathers’/guardians’ occupations are presented first, in Table 4.6

Table 4.6 Fathers’/Guardians’ Occupations and students’ average score on assignment.

Occupation	Frequency	Percentage	Average score
Unemployed	19	20	14.6
Self Employed	16	16	14.4
Owens a Business	11	11	16.3
Public Sector	33	34	14.7
Private Sector	18	19	14.8
Total	97	100	

Most respondents indicate that their fathers/guardians are in the public sector. Students specified the nature of their fathers’/guardians’ jobs in the public sector and they include clerks, electricians, teachers, school heads, mechanical fitters, military police and army, spin weavers and darkroom technicians. The table shows that twenty percent of fathers are unemployed but student respondents reported that they do self jobs like farming and selling to survive. Those who own a business range from large scale businesses like haulage trucking to small scale, like tuck-shop running, according to information provided by respondents, and they constitute 11%. Finally, the private sector absorbs 18% with respondents reporting that their jobs range from messengers, engineers, motivational speakers to accountants. The average scores show that students whose fathers/guardians own businesses have higher average scores in academic writing

as compared to their counterparts. The results present mixed findings as the average score for students who reported that their fathers/guardians are in the public sector, private sector, unemployed or self employed is more or less the same.

Lecturers interviewed argued that students from low socio-economic status were handicapped in some way;

Students of parents with lower socio-economic statuses show less ability in academic writing skills

Another lecturer supported the idea saying;

Parental occupation is associated with writing. Occupation usually determines income. If parents have high paying jobs, their children score high in academic writing. Economic potential allows access to books and technology and determines the social; therefore it affects academic writing (lecturer2)

Table 4.7 Mothers’/Guardians’ Occupations and students’ average score on assignment

Occupation	Total Number	Percentage	Average score
Unemployed	40	41	14.4
Self Employed	28	29	15.7
Owens a Business	5	5	16.4
Public Sector	19	20	14.8
Private Sector	5	5	13.1
Total	97	100	

The majority of respondents reported that their mothers are unemployed. However, 29% are self-employed doing farm work, dressmaking, cross border trading, vending and operating flea markets. Five percent of the respondents' mothers/guardians own businesses, probably alongside the fathers and the same percentage are also in the private sector as risk control managers, laboratory technicians and engineers. A fair share is in the public sector as nurses and teachers mostly.

Students who reported that their mothers/guardians own businesses recorded a higher average score than those who reported that their mothers are self-employed. Those who reported their mothers are in the public sector and unemployed scored more or less the same averages. Finally, those who reported that their mothers are in the private sector scored less than the rest of the students. However, the scores are evenly spread.

Parental level of education

The study also investigated if an association exists between parental level of education and academic writing skills. The results are shown in Table 4.8

Table 4.8. Parental level of education and students' average score on assignment.

Level of Education	Fathers	%	Average score	Mothers	%	Average score
Primary	9	9.2	14.2	13	13.4	14.6
Secondary	25	25.7	15.2	44	45.3	14.8
Tertiary	63	64.9	15.8	40	41.2	14.9
Total	97			97		

Students who reported that their fathers and mothers attained tertiary education obtained a higher average score. However, the average score for students who reported that their fathers obtained secondary education is higher than that of those who reported their mothers' attained the same level. Those who reported that their mothers attained primary education had a slightly higher average score than those whose fathers are in the same position.

Lecturers had this to say on parental levels of education;

Where parents are themselves educated, this has a bearing on academic writing of their children. Parents are going to value the importance of education. Parents' knowledge and their perception towards education improves. (lecturer2)

4.2.3.2. High schools attended and academic writing skills

This study also investigated if there is a link between university students' academic writing skills and the type of high schools they attended. An investigation of the high schools attended by students was done, since there is a direct transition from high school to university. The results are shown in Table 4.8.

Table 4.9 High schools attended and students' average score on assignment.

Type of School	Number of Students	Percentage	Average score
Mission	42	43.2	16
Rural Day	12	12.3	12.1
Urban Day	26	26.8	14.4
Former Group A	9	9.2	16
Private	8	8.24	15.2
Farm	0	0	0

Table 4.9 shows a lot of inconsistencies Results in the table show those students who reported that they attended former group “A” and mission schools presented a higher average score, followed by those at private schools. On the other hand, students who reported that they attended urban schools scored a higher average than those who reported they attended rural day schools. No students attended farm schools; therefore there was no average score

The results from the study link with what the lecturers had to say;

Definitely schools have an influence on academic writing .If students had come from schools where they are properly corrected by a teacher who was adequately supervised ...then perhaps some of these problems we will not be having them(lecturer 1)

The link between schools attended and academic writing skills is not clear-cut. In this regard, another lecturer alluded to the fact that;

Schools have an effect on grammar and expressions. In high density and rural areas schools are not perfected .Students struggle to even construct a sentence, but a serious student can excel under such conditions (lecturer3).

4.2.3.3. Residential Areas and academic writing skills

This study further investigated whether there was an association between residential areas and academic writing skills Results are presented in Table 4.10

Table 4.10 Residential Areas and students' average score an assignment.

Area	Number of Students	%	Average score
High Density	25	25.7	15.5
Low Density	18	18.5	15.1
Medium Density	21	21.6	14.8
Rural	25	25.7	12.4
Farm	8	8.2	14.3

Most students reported that they come from the high density suburbs and the rural areas. A fair share is in the low and medium densities while few are from the farms. From the average scores, students from high density areas obtained higher scores than their counterparts .Though this might be true there is need to consider marks that are outliers as they affect the whole average score

Students' residences were also considered in terms of where they stay during semester days .Results are shown in Table 4.11

Table 4.11: Residential areas and students' average score on assignment.

Area	Frequency	Average score
Senga/Nehosho	67	15.1
Campus	10	14.9
Town	4	14.8
Other	16	14.8

Most students who reported that they reside in Gweru stay at their homes and commute to college from areas such as Mkoba, Kopje, Windsor and Lundi Park. This is a sign of high income level, but can also be considered cheaper than residing in Senga where there is overcrowding. Of the respondents 67 stay in Senga, in college halls of residence, 4 at college flats in town and the rest from areas as Kopje and Windsor. Students who reside in Senga are however, crowded; there is limited space as they share accommodation, hence they have to make do with reading in the libraries or outside campus residences. However, such students' average score is 15; showing that despite conditions prevailing within the environment they have higher average scores, than the others who range around 14.1.

Lecturers' views are contrary to what the students reported in this study and as one lecturer commented;

Students from high density areas suffer from overcrowding effect. There are too many people and a lot of noise. (lecturer2)

Another lecturer said;

If they come from a community with a reading and writing culture, something will rub off from the community onto the students. (Lecturer 4)

4.2.3.4. Language and academic writing skills.

The study also looked at the association between language and academic writing skills of students, basing on the average scores obtained. The research question reads as follows: What influence does language have on academic writing skills of students? Results obtained are shown in table 4.11

Table 4.12 Language and students average score on assignment

Language Aspect	Frequency	Percentage	Average Score
Use English at home	43	43.4	15.3
Do not use English at home	54	55.6	13
Find writing more difficult than speaking	32	32.9	14.9
Find writing less difficult than speaking.	65	67.0	16.1
Consider writing ability as good	49	50.5	15.5
Consider writing skills as fair	47	48.4	13.7
Consider writing skills as bad	1	1.0	12.5

Students who reported that they use English at home have a higher average than those who do not. Those who reported that they find writing more difficult than speaking scored less on average as compared to those who reported that they found writing less difficult than speaking. The students who reported that their writing ability was good obtained higher average scores than those who reported they considered it fair and bad.

4.5.5 Preferences, values and attitudes and academic writing skills

Finally, basing on the research question ‘Do students’ preferences, values and attitudes have any effect on their academic writing?, further investigations were carried out. Several indicators were used and results shown in table 4.11 obtained.

Table 4.13 Ways of Living as an Indicator of Status and average scores on assignments

	Frequency	%	Average Score
Groceries bought monthly	53	54.6	15.9
Groceries bought in bulk	20	20.6	16.1
Groceries bought one by one	24	24.7	15.8
Library at home	23	23.7	15.2
Do not have a library at home	74	76.2	16.8
Have a television at home	85	87.6	14.3
Do not have a television	12	12.3	13.1
Own computer	30	30.9	15.7

No computer	67	69.0	15.2
Own a laptop	12	12.3	15.4
No laptop	85	87.6	16.1
Can drive	29	29.8	16.3
Cannot drive	66	68.0	15.9

From the table, it can be said that not all variables of life are associated with academic writing skills. Whether groceries are bought monthly, in bulk or one by one have no association with academic writing, as there are same average scores for all aspects. Such have no direct impact on academic writing. It can be noted that students who have libraries at home score less average than those who do not. However on media, those who watch TV and own a computer have higher average scores than their counterparts. There is no significant association between those who have/ do not have laptops and those who drive/ cannot drive.

Parental Reading Preferences

A closed question on whether students' parents read newspapers/ magazines was asked and students responded as shown in table 4.12:

Table 4.14: Parental reading preferences and Average score on assignment

Parents read	85	15.6
Parents do not read	12	13.2

Parental reading preferences sometimes have a relationship with students reading preferences. Children tend to follow what their parents read thus the preferences of parents exert influence on

reading preferences of children. Parents who read literature relatively often as well give direct parental stimulation and this has positive consequences for present writing levels.

Student respondents indicated that they read novels, magazines as well as other materials like textbooks, newspapers, political material, motivation books and the bible. Table 4.13 shows the statistics.

Table 4.15: Reading preferences of students and average score on assignment

Material	Frequency	Average assignment score.
Novels	32	14.8
Magazine	34	14.8
Other	30	14.8

Results from Table 4.13 show those respondents who read novels, magazines and any other reading material have the same average score meaning a reading culture enhances academic writing ability.

4.6 Discussion.

Discussion of results is done in order to answer the research questions.

4.6.1 Socio-economic status

Findings from the study revealed that fathers' occupations are associated with academic writing skills of students. This concurs with previous research by (Giddens 1992; Vereecken, Maes & De Bacquer,(2004);Ezewu,1983 &Datta,1984. On the mothers' side, the association is slight,

therefore unnoticeable. Usually, the occupation one has, has a bearing on income therefore occupation can, to some extent reveal the economic credentials of a family .,This in turn affects the social position of students, because the more parents earn, the more they are able to spend on their children towards academic writing by providing adequate resources.

From the findings, level of education of parents has less association with academic writing skills. The results contrast previous research as done by (Haralambos and Holborn ,2008; Barnard etal 1994; & Datta 1984).Most people are educated with achievements as high as degrees, but unemployed or employed in low paying jobs as teachers and nurses., which is not related to their qualifications. Such are professionals in public service ,who are high in “cultural capital” and low in economic capital but tend to pursue healthy, active lifestyles involving exercise, low alcohol consumption and participation in cultural and community activities.

However, traditionally, such variables as parental level of education have been regarded as predictors of academic writing, but in this study, findings are different from the expectedWith the current economic conditions in Zimbabwe, those who own businesses have more economic capital than the formally employed ,therefore they can affords to provide adequate resources to enable their children in academic writing. Also, those who are self employed might be cross-boarder traders who earn more income than those in formal employment

4.6.2 High Schools.

Previous research on writing development indicate that the effect of social background on children’s academic writing is already present at the start of the educational career.(Ezewu, 1983;Datta, 1984:;Lareau, 1989).Private schools ,mission schools and former group “A” schools have a higher learning culture which puts students at an advantage. Parents of such students are

able exploit the market in search of quality schools for their children. Urban day schools are overcrowded, with hot sitting, to cater for all students as per community needs.

On the other hand, students from rural day areas are highly disadvantaged .They walk long distances to school, have poor and ill-constructed buildings and do not have desks and libraries. Sometimes the teachers do not reside at school and miss out on most lessons and this associates with the low average score, Such students enter university at a disadvantage because of the deficiencies and backlogs they have(Strydom ;1993).Therefore, there is an association between schools attended and academic writing.

4.6.3. Residential areas

Findings fro the study shows that students who come from high density have a higher average on the assignment score followed by those who reside in low densities. These findings are not consistent with previous researches which purport that students from low densities which are quiet places and have well stocked libraries excel in academic writing (Barnard etal 1994).Residing in low densities is associated with high income and high status in society .However the study by Barnard et al (2004) concur with the situation in rural day schools where students who reside in rural areas have the least average score. The assumption is that they do not have adequate resources and their parents are not giving them enough writing practice.

4.6.4 Language

Research findings show that students who use English at home have an advantage over their counterparts who do not use English.Cope and Kalantzis (2001) assert that learners can achieve social inclusion through a facility with language and writing. However, most students in the study reside in high density areas, attend mission schools and in this, their interaction with

English is minimal, usually at school as a second language. However, because most parents are now educated, they now allow a mixture of the indigenous languages with English, giving their children enough practice. According to Datta (1984), language is likely to expose the student to certain attitudes, values and levels of aspiration. Student on their writing skills were based on ratings of their writings.

4.6.5 Preferences, values and attitudes

Findings from the research concur with findings from other scholars as Haralambos and Hplborn (2008) There is an association between preferences, values and attitudes and academic writing skills as shown by the average scores. Parental reading preferences sometimes have a relationship with their children's reading preferences. Parents who read literature relatively often as well give direct parent stimulation and this has positive consequences for present writing levels. Reading and other preferences are part of this.

4.8 Summary.

This chapter has presented and discussed findings from questionnaires, interviews and document analysis which were a form of triangulation. A thematic approach was used where each research question was analysed. It is worth noting that, basing on the findings; students whose parents are able "economically" score higher averages in academic writing though the gap at university level is slight as shown by the average score which are at the same range with the mean. Also, the type of schools and residences affect academic writing as students are groomed at better schools from an early age, both to speak and write. In this study, the researcher noted that students who are insufficiently developed in academic language competency in the language of teaching and learning are affected generally in their academic studies. The next chapter gives a summary of

the study, conclusions and recommendations.

CHAPTER 5

Summary, Conclusions and Recommendations

5.1. Introduction

The previous chapter presented, analysed and discussed data. This chapter gives a summary of the whole study, citing problems encountered and how they were dealt with, as well as conclusions and recommendations.

5.2 Summary of the research

This study focused on the association between cultural capital and academic writing skills of level one semester one student at Midlands State University. Chapter one gave a background to the study showing the massification of university education in Zimbabwe, and the importance of the ability to write in-depth academic essays which is regarded as one of the hallmarks of higher education. It also gave a statement of the problem, research questions assumptions, significance of the study, limitations, delimitations and a definition of key terms.

Chapter two gave a conceptual framework related to the study. The chapter reviewed previous findings on the association between cultural capital and academic writing skills. Variables used in reviewing literature included socio-economic status, residences, language, schools attended and values, preferences and attitudes. Such variables revealed mixed findings with some having an association with academic writing and others not.

Research methodology was done in Chapter three. The case study design was used and stratified random sampling employed. Data were collected through questionnaires, interviews and document analysis. The collected data were managed through hardcopies and softcopies for storage and analysed through narration, graphs and tables

Presentation and analysis of findings was done in Chapter four which also put the discussion into context. Presentation and analysis was done through tables and narrations Results that emerged were mixed and while some results confirmed the previous findings they were inconsistent with existing literature. Contrary findings were also reported.

Like any other study, this study had its own limitations. The researcher encountered problems of delays in marking by lecturers. Different departments within the Centre are taught by different lecturers and some delayed in providing marked assignments for document analysis. The researcher minimized this by making personal follow ups on the lecturers concerned and finally got the assignments. The other challenge was on the return rate of questionnaires, but overall 82% were returned. It is not known why some students decided to keep the questionnaires or return them uncompleted. However, considering the high response rate those who did not return the questionnaires might not have influenced the study in any way. Time was a limiting factor and use of the internet was minimal due to constant power cuts.

5.3 Conclusions

Having given the summary to the research, a review of the main findings providing answers to the sub questions was done.

From this study parental level of education and occupation were used as variables of socio-economic status. Findings of the study revealed that there is no distinct association between academic writing skills and parental occupation as shown by the average assignment scores which fall within the same range..On parental level of education, an association with academic writing skills can be derived as shown by the higher average scores obtained by students who

reported that their fathers attained tertiary education .This concurs with literature by(Vereecken, Maes & De Bacquer, 2004); Watkins 1997)

This study focused on high schools as they give a direct transition from schools to universities. Findings reveal that there is an association between secondary schools academic writing skills as shown by the higher average scores obtained by students who reported that they attended mission former group “A” and private schools. This is consistent with earlier studies by (Gee, 1990 & Ezewu ,1983) that have reported that the culture of the school attended has an impact on academic writing. Students who reported that they attended rural day schools attained the lowest average scores. A similar finding was done by Strydom (1993) who talks about them having deficiencies and backlogs.

The study also revealed that students from high density areas have a higher average score. The most common assumption is that those from low density areas should excel. However, most rural residents are disadvantaged .Though there are some students whose parents are teachers and nurses and staying at growth points where there is electricity and spacious accommodation or whose parents own businesses in rural areas, and they have comfortable homes with reading and writing space, the majority however reside in the rural villages where there is inadequate water, no electricity and have little time to practice writing because of inadequacy of resource

Findings from the study revealed that students who reported that they do use English at home and have a higher perception of their linguistic prose rated by how they rate their academic writing abilities obtained higher average scores. This links with existing literature by (Hinkel 2006) and shows there is an association language and academic writing skills.

The study found out that parental preferences affected their children's preferences also. Parents who read magazines and newspapers give the same culture of reading to their children. Also, students who read novels, magazines and academic material tended to obtain a favorable average score. There is no direct link between preferences and academic writing skills, probably because the elements considered have no direct bearing on academic writing skills.

Recommendations

This study made the following recommendations in relation to the findings.

- Parents should have a reading culture in order to encourage their children academically.
- Parents should encourage use of English at home.
- Students should be exposed to various forms of media such as the television
- Teachers should boost confidence of students in order to encourage good use of technical and grammatical skills.
- The government should set uniform standards to be followed by different schools, for example mission schools, government schools and private schools. Several colleges are mushrooming countrywide and they produce students who do not have enough linguistic competencies to write academically

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Questionnaire for students

I am a student at Midlands State University carrying out a research on the influence of cultural capital on academic writing skills .Please, kindly respond to this questionnaire by ticking the correct answer or providing information in detail where necessary. The information you give will be used solely for this research .Strict confidentiality will be maintained .Do not write your name.

1. Sex: Male Female

2. Age 17 – 20
 21 – 24
 25 – 28
 Above 28

3. Programme

4. Registration No.....

5. What is the occupation of your father/guardian?

Unemployed
Self employed
Owns a business
Public sector

Private sector

Specify the nature of the job.

6. What is the occupation of your mother/guardian?

Unemployed

Self employed

Owns a business

Public sector

Private sector

Specify the nature of the job.

7. What level of education did your father/guardian attain?

Primary

Secondary

Tertiary

8. What level of education did your mother/guardian attain?

Primary

Secondary

Tertiary

9. What type of community does your family reside in?

High density

Medium density

Low density

Rural

Farm

10 What type of school did you attend at primary?

Mission

Rural day

Urban day

Private

Former group A

11 What type of school did you attend at secondary?

Mission

Rural day

Urban day

Private

Former group A

12. What type of school did you attend at high school?

Mission

Rural day

Urban day

Private

Former group A

13. Do your parents/guardian read newspapers and/or magazines?

Yes

No

14 How do your parents/guardians buy groceries at home?

Monthly

In bulk

One by one as the goods get finished

15. Do you have a library at home?

Yes

No

16 Do you watch TV at home?

Yes

No

17 Do you have a computer at home?

Yes

No

18. Do you own a laptop?

Yes

No

19. Can you drive a car?

Yes

No

20 Where do you reside during the course of the semester?

Senga/Nehosho

Daylesford

Mkoba

Out of Gweru

Other

 (Specify)

21. What do you read mostly?

-novels

-magazines

-any other

(specify) -----

.

22 Do you use English to communicate at home?

Yes

No

23 Do you find writing in English more difficult than speaking?

Yes

No

24 How do you rate your writing ability?

Good

Bad

Fair